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DE RUEHPS #0051/01 0301801
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM USOFFICE PRISTINA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7958
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1003
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1398
RHFMISS/AFSOUTH NAPLES IT PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR TF FALCON PRIORITY
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RUEPGEA/CDR650THMIGP SHAPE BE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUFOANA/USNIC PRISTINA SR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000051

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EUR/ACE FOR DMAYHEW

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2018
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [KV](#) [UNMIK](#)
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: BELGRADE-ALIGNED GORANI ETHNIC GROUP POSES
CHALLENGES FOR KOSOVO

Classified By: COM Tina S. Kaidanow for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. The Gorani, a small Slavic Muslim community that resides in the isolated mountains of southern Kosovo's Dragash municipality, retain close ties with the Serbian government. Serbian funding for a parallel education system is one such strong link, as are subsidies, jobs, and pensions paid for by Belgrade's Coordination Center for Kosovo (CCK). As a quid pro quo, perhaps, the CCK apparatus has been increasing pressure on Goranis to toe Belgrade's line and draw back from its already limited cooperation with the Kosovo government and the international community. The Gorani are also bitterly opposed by the Bosniak community in Kosovo, a key ally in Kosovo's independence drive; Bosniaks view Goranis as "Bosniaks under Serbian control" and have fought to deny them special language or other rights. While overall tensions in Dragash are low, a recent bombing at a Serbian bank, which is the main transfer point for funds from Belgrade, could presage trouble in the future. END SUMMARY.

Who Are The Gorani?

12. (C) Currently numbering around 5,000 (from a pre-1999 estimate of 16,000) the Gorani community is a Slavic Muslim group residing in the southernmost tip of Kosovo, in Dragash municipality. The Gorani, former Orthodox Serbs living in mountainous areas ("Gora" means "mountain" in old Serbian), were compelled to convert to Islam in exchange for accepting assistance from their Ottoman rulers in times of drought and crop shortfall. While maintaining a unique identity, the Gorani have always spoken Serbian and have chosen to retain close ties to Belgrade. This in turn has become a continual source of friction with neighboring Kosovo Albanian and Bosniak communities in Dragash. Adding to the potential frictions, hardline elements from both inside and outside the Gorani community are pushing its members to toe the Serbian government line even more closely than in the past. Recent developments illustrate the pressures faced by the Gorani - some as a result of their own choices - as they await the final determination of Kosovo's status.

13. (C) The chief tie the Gorani maintain with Belgrade is related to education. The Serbian government plays a central and growing role in providing this community with educational materials, curricula, textbooks, teacher salaries, and even school buildings. (Note: The Gorani have consistently preferred to accept this assistance rather than integrate more closely into the PISG-based educational system.) As we have seen with almost all Serbian government assistance in Kosovo, education assistance to the Gorani has become more politicized in recent months. On October 10, 2007, State Secretary in the Serbian Ministry for Kosovo Dusan Prorokovic visited Dragash, delivering schoolbooks for Gorani students. Reacting to this, on October 11, Dragash Municipal Director of Education Xhemi Iliazi (ethnic Albanian) announced that he planned to shut down the high school in the Gorani village of Mlike unless it began using the Kosovo government curriculum.

14. (C) Iliazi told us privately he had been pressured to do so by local Kosovo Bosniak politicians, who, as another Slavic-Muslim community in Kosovo, but one with no ties to Belgrade, have been trying to compel the Gorani to identify themselves as Bosniaks, with the presumed goal of having greater political clout. The tensions between Bosniaks and Gorani has led in effect to the complete parallelization of the Gorani education system. The Gorani have, for the most part, accepted this outcome without making any attempt to accommodate PISG concerns. A new parallel high school has opened in the village of Mlike, and there are three parallel elementary schools for Gorani in Dragash. All use the Serbian curriculum only.

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CCK: Increasing Activity

15. (C) The Gorani community is alone among non-Serb minorities in Kosovo in having its own representative from the CCK. Local CCK representative Abdyl Alija has cut a higher profile in recent weeks, moving operations from an internet cafe (which he owns) to a rented house in the village of Vraniste. On January 11 visit to the office, we met with a small group of local CCK employees, and our discussions revealed the Goranis' conundrum regarding their ties to Belgrade. The CCK officials were happy to show us lists of Gorani getting child-welfare payments from the Serbian government and to detail their own role in facilitating applications for Serbian pensions, passports, and other documents. Depicting their activities as essential services for their isolated community, the CCK workers also decried the community's near-total dependence on Belgrade for survival, with one of them telling us "every Gorani gets a pension or a job paid for by Belgrade. Everyone else is living abroad."

16. (C) Alija was scheduled to meet us in Vraniste, but as with other recent meetings we have set with CCK officials, he was "called away at the last minute" for a meeting in Mitrovica. While Alija has generally been open in speaking with us, more moderate Gorani contacts report that Alija's behavior has become more hardline of late. CCK-affiliated types have sat in front of the entrance to GIG party (the Citizens' Initiative of Gora, the sole Gorani party willing to deal with the PISG, which is now represented by a single parliamentarian in the Kosovo Assembly) headquarters in Dragash, intimidating visitors. In addition, Alija conducted a campaign ahead of the November 17 Kosovo elections, threatening GIG members and other Gorani in general that there would be "consequences" if they voted. While GIG leader Murselji Halili said he received assurances from other officials in Belgrade that there would be no retribution against those choosing to vote, he told us he is concerned that Alija and the CCK may have collected lists of those who dared to do so. He also corroborated reports we have heard

elsewhere that the hardline northern Serb leadership now exercises increased influence over CCK operations. Halili explained that before Alija's appointment, GIG had put forward a more moderate candidate to Belgrade for the local CCK position, but that Alija decided to suggest himself instead. Halili alleged that, as with many other CCK coordinators throughout Kosovo, Alija is deeply corrupt.

Bank Bomb

17. (C) Another recent incident adding to the general uncertainty in the Gorani community was the January 1 explosion at the offices of Komercialna Banka in the town of Dragash. Komercialna Banka is the only Serbian-government owned institution allowed by UNMIK to operate inside Kosovo, serving as the main conduit for Serbian government pensions, subsidies, and financial transfers to both individual Gorani and the CCK. Both Alija and Halili told us that they considered the blast to have been directed at the Gorani by actors unhappy with the community's ties to Belgrade. However, lower-ranking CCK employees from the Vraniste office told us that organized crime was most likely behind the blast. (Note: This same Dragash bank branch was also bombed in February 2006. We heard on January 30 from COMKFOR POLAD Romauld Pichard that his sources told him the real target of the blast was not the bank but another office adjacent to it, which the CCK had planned to turn into a new "Ministry for Kosovo" office. Romuald claimed that the perpetrators may have been trying to send a signal to the CCK that although the Ministry for Kosovo opened an office in Mitrovica December 10, such an office would not be welcome in Dragash. End Note.).

A Moderate Voice - But Not in the Majority

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18. (C) For his part, Halili, a longtime USOP contact, told us that his GIG party is interested in participating in Kosovo institutions, and he claims that the party's acceptance by both Pristina and Belgrade makes it the best representative for the Gorani community. (Comment: While certainly the Kosovo Government is interested in supporting the moderate Halili, it is very doubtful he has Belgrade's support.) In the new Kosovo Assembly, Halili has aligned himself with the moderate Kosovo Serb Independent Liberal Party (SLS), which is part of the governing coalition - the first time GIG has joined a local Serb political grouping. However, while Halili intends to look for ways the Gorani can benefit from participation in government, he admits that Alija and the CCK have much more to offer the Gorani community than the PISG in terms of financial incentive.

Comment

19. (C) As has long been the case, the Gorani continue to rely on more powerful patrons for support. The current iteration of this relationship, however, puts them in danger of further isolation and conflict with neighboring Albanians and Bosniaks, who frequently voice their displeasure at the Goranis' links to Belgrade. Traditionally, the strained ties between the Gorani and the PISG, as well as with the Bosniak community, have left the government with few viable options in trying to integrate them into Kosovo institutions. On the other hand, increased pressure from the CCK to toe the Belgrade line is consistent with pressure we have seen directed against Serbs elsewhere in Kosovo. As we move towards independence, it is almost certain that this pressure will increase and that moderate Gorani leaders like Halili will find themselves squeezed. The decentralization provisions of the Ahtisaari plan are tailor-made for the Gorani: they can maintain all transparent links to Belgrade -- including in education -- and have increased roles in local governance. Whether they choose or are allowed by Belgrade to take this route, however, remains to be seen.

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